

## Message Text

SECRET

PAGE 01 PANAMA 03166 042230Z  
ACTION ARA-06

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 L-01 SS-14 SP-02 PRS-01 SAB-01  
PM-03 INR-05 /034 W  
-----042250Z 003621 /12  
R 042203Z MAY 77  
FM AMEMBASSY PANAMA  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1756

S E C R E T PANAMA 3166

STADIS////////////////////////////////

LIMDIS

EO 11652: GDS  
TAGS: PFOR, PN  
SUBJECT: PANAMANIAN MOOD ON THE EVE OF THE MAY NEGOTIATING ROUND

REF: PANAMA 3157

1. THERE HAVE BEEN MIXED SIGNALS FROM HERE ON THE PANAMANIAN GOVERNMENT'S ATTITUDE TOWARD THE NEXT ROUND OF NEGOTIATIONS. ON BALANCE, THE "BAD" SIGNALS SEEM TO FAR OVERSHADOW THE POSITIVE.
2. THE DECISION BY "CRITICA" -- AND TO A LESSER EXTENT BY OTHER PANAMANIAN MEDIA -- TO MAKE A CAUSE CELEBRE OF THE AP INTERVIEW WITH GENERAL MCAULIFFE (REFTEL) COMES ON TOP OF A GENERALLY SOUR PRESS ATTITUDE TOWARD THE U.S., THE CANAL ZONE AND THE NEGOTIATIONS IN RECENT WEEKS.
3. A NUMBER OF RECENT INCIDENTS IN THE ZONE HAVE IRRITATED THE PANAMANIAN. IN SOME CASES, THE MEDIA HAVE BLOWN UP MINOR INCIDENTS OUT OF ALL PROPORTION. THE IRIBERRI INCIDENT APPEARS TO BE A TYPICAL CASE OF THE PANAMANIAN GOVERNMENT TAKING A POINT OF ROUTINE FRICTION AND INFLATING IT INTO A CONFRONTATION. RECENT MANEUVERS BY US MILITARY FORCES IN THE CANAL ZONE HAVE DRAWN EXAGGERATED

SECRET

SECRET

PAGE 02 PANAMA 03166 042230Z

PRESS ATTENTION AND CAUSED SOME TENSION LOCALLY. MILGROUP OFFICERS HAVE NOTED A RECENT COOLING IN THEIR RELATIONS WITH NATIONAL GUARD COUNTERPARTS. THE PRESS HAS ALSO CONTINUED TO TAKE JABS AT THE MARCH 15 STATEMENT OF ASSURANCES TO CANAL EMPLOYEES. ROMULO ESCOBAR BETHANCOURT -- WHO DOUBLES AS TREATY NEGOTIATOR, TORRIJOS ADVISER AND HEAD OF THE NATIONAL INFORMATION COMM-  
MISSION -- MENTIONED SEVERAL OF THESE IN HIS OFFICIAL STATEMENT

ON THE MCAULIFFE INTERVIEW.

4. IN COSTA RICA AND IN PANAMA, TREATY NEGOTIATOR ROMULO ESCOBAR BETHANCOURT HAS MADE DISPARAGING REMARKS ABOUT THE U.S. NEGOTIATORS' WILLINGNESS TO CONSUMMATE PRESIDENT CARTER'S PROMISE OF A FAIR TREATY. THESE STORIES HAVE BEEN ALMOST THE ONLY MEDIA COMMENTARY ON THE UPCOMING NEGOTIATING ROUND. THERE IS NO SENSE OF ENTHUSIASM OR EXPECTATION. QUITE THE CONTRARY.

5. THIS PUBLIC BITCHINESS SEEMS TO REFLECT OFFICIAL PANAMANIAN PESSIMISM ABOUT US AND PARTICULARLY ABOUT THE MAY ROUND. BOTH PUBLICLY AND PRIVATELY, TORRIJOS HAS BELITTLED THE LIKELIHOOD OF MAJOR SUCCESS IN THE NEW ROUND (PANAMA 2942, VARIOUS INTELLIGENCE REPORTS). THE ABSENCE OF "TECHNICIANS" (E.G., LOPEZ GUEVARA, DE LA ROSA, AND THE LANDS AND WATERS/ADMINISTRATION TECHNICAL GROUP) FROM THE TEAM HE IS SENDING TO WASHINGTON MAY INDICATE THAT THE PANAMANIAN TEAM IS PRIMARILY INTERESTED IN "SEEING WHAT THE GRINGOS HAVE TO OFFER" -- NOT DETAILED NEGOTIATING -- ON MOST ISSUES.

6. ALL OF THIS OCCURS AT A TIME WHEN DOMESTIC POLITICS, ALTHOUGH FAR FROM TUMULTUOUS, CONTINUES TO BE UNSETTLED. MAY DAY WAS A FLOP. STUDENTS REMAIN RESTLESS AND IMPONDERABLE. TORRIJOS' APRIL 30 PERSONAL APPEARANCE IN SAN MIGUELITO, FORMERLY A BASTION OF SUPPORT, WAS GREETED WITH QUERULOUSNESS AND GRUMBLING ABOUT DOMESTIC ISSUES.

7. A FAR MORE POSITIVE SIGNAL WAS THE APPOINTMENT OF GABRIEL LEWIS AS AMBASSADOR TO THE U.S. LEWIS IS A MODERATE WHO HAS  
SECRET

SECRET

PAGE 03 PANAMA 03166 042230Z

THE EAR AND CONFIDENCE OF TORRIJOS. IN ADDITION, WE CONTINUE TO RECEIVE REPORTS FROM PERSONS WHO HAVE SPOKEN WITH TORRIJOS THAT HE IS GENUINELY EAGER TO GET A TREATY.

8. NEVERTHELESS, WE FIND THE MOOD HERE ONE OF PESSIMISM AND SOME CONFUSION. SEVERAL MEMBERS OF THE NEGOTIATING TEAM WHO ARE NOT SCHEDULED TO GO TO WASHINGTON CLAIM TO BE WORRIED THAT PANAMA'S POSITION MAY BE TOO INFLEXIBLE IN THE NEXT ROUND. AS FAR AS WE HAVE BEEN ABLE TO DETERMINE, THERE HAS BEEN NO IMPORTANT REFINEMENT OF THE OVERALL PANAMANIAN POSITION SINCE THE FEBRUARY ROUND.

9. WE DO NOT EXPECT THE PANAMANIAN TO TAKE A HIGHLY PROVOCATIVE STAND IN WASHINGTON, THOUGH THERE MAY BE SOME FIREWORKS IF THEY BELIEVE WE ARE DRAGGING OUR FEET. BUT NEITHER DO WE PERCEIVE ANY INDICATION THAT THEY LEAVE PANAMA WITH MUCH "POLITICAL WILL" BEHIND THEM TO MAKE HARD DECISIONS WHICH WILL MARK THE WAY FOR AN EARLY TREATY SIGNING.

GONZALEZ

SECRET

NNN

## Message Attributes

**Automatic Decaptioning:** Z  
**Capture Date:** 01-Jan-1994 12:00:00 am  
**Channel Indicators:** n/a  
**Current Classification:** UNCLASSIFIED  
**Concepts:** PUBLIC ATTITUDES, NEGOTIATIONS, CANALS  
**Control Number:** n/a  
**Copy:** SINGLE  
**Sent Date:** 04-May-1977 12:00:00 am  
**Decaption Date:** 22 May 2009  
**Decaption Note:** 25 YEAR REVIEW  
**Disposition Action:** RELEASED  
**Disposition Approved on Date:**  
**Disposition Case Number:** n/a  
**Disposition Comment:** 25 YEAR REVIEW  
**Disposition Date:** 22 May 2009  
**Disposition Event:**  
**Disposition History:** n/a  
**Disposition Reason:**  
**Disposition Remarks:**  
**Document Number:** 1977PANAMA03166  
**Document Source:** CORE  
**Document Unique ID:** 00  
**Drafter:** n/a  
**Enclosure:** n/a  
**Executive Order:** GS  
**Errors:** N/A  
**Expiration:**  
**Film Number:** D770157-0025  
**Format:** TEL  
**From:** PANAMA  
**Handling Restrictions:**  
**Image Path:**  
**ISecure:** 1  
**Legacy Key:** link1977/newtext/t19770595/aaaadegr.tel  
**Line Count:** 117  
**Litigation Code IDs:**  
**Litigation Codes:**  
**Litigation History:**  
**Locator:** TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM  
**Message ID:** 31578c9a-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc  
**Office:** ACTION ARA  
**Original Classification:** SECRET  
**Original Handling Restrictions:** LIMDIS, STADIS  
**Original Previous Classification:** n/a  
**Original Previous Handling Restrictions:** n/a  
**Page Count:** 3  
**Previous Channel Indicators:** n/a  
**Previous Classification:** SECRET  
**Previous Handling Restrictions:** LIMDIS, STADIS  
**Reference:** 77 PANAMA 3157  
**Retention:** 0  
**Review Action:** RELEASED, APPROVED  
**Review Content Flags:**  
**Review Date:** 29-Mar-2005 12:00:00 am  
**Review Event:**  
**Review Exemptions:** n/a  
**Review Media Identifier:**  
**Review Release Date:** n/a  
**Review Release Event:** n/a  
**Review Transfer Date:**  
**Review Withdrawn Fields:** n/a  
**SAS ID:** 2644528  
**Secure:** OPEN  
**Status:** NATIVE  
**Subject:** PANAMANIAN MOOD ON THE EVE OF THE MAY NEGOTIATING ROUND  
**TAGS:** PFOR, PN  
**To:** STATE  
**Type:** TE  
**vdkgvwkey:** odbc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS\_Docs/31578c9a-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc  
**Review Markings:**  
Margaret P. Grafeld  
Declassified/Released  
US Department of State  
EO Systematic Review  
22 May 2009  
**Markings:** Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 22 May 2009